Connected But Not Alike:Cross-Cultural Comparison of Generation Y in China and South Africa

Prof. Nandani Lynton, PhD, China Europe International Business School (China)
Prof. Kurt April, PhD, University of Cape Town (South Africa) & Ashridge (UK)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the values of Generation Y in China and South Africa to test the widespread assumption that young people are developing a common global youth culture and which organizations can respond with global programs. This convergence perspective posits that economics drives culture and that increasing levels of material well-being will lead to the spread of international, Western-style behaviour and values. The study analyzes original research data from surveys of 272 Gen Y individuals in China and South Africa to trace their similarities and differences, taking into account their experience of macro-level change and increased global connectedness. The results show continued cultural divergence and highlight the different cultural meaning given to superficially similar values statements. This implies that global organizations must localize HR programs to be effective.

Keywords: cultural values; comparative HRM; cross-cultural; generation Y

INTRODUCTION

As all parts of the world become increasingly globalized, and their populations are increasingly linked through technology (Childs et al., 2010; Fang, 2005), there is a widespread assumption that young people are developing a common global youth culture along the model many academics and journalists consider Western (Epstein, 1998; Gidley, 2001). In fact, it has been asserted that youth around the world are more like each other than they are like the elders in their own countries (Hassan & Katsanis, 1994; Moses, 2000). This perspective posits that economics drives culture and that increasing levels of material well-being will lead to the spread of Western behaviour (Ralston et al., 1993). The logic assumes that similarity of lifestyle will also lead to increasing similarity of values (April & Blass, 2010; Theimann et al., 2006). The convergence perspectives run counter to cultural studies and anthropological theory, both of which assume that core cultural values are developed over millennia and change very slowly (Becker, 2007; Despres et al., 1968; Gaudelli, 2001; Hirschfeld, 1996; Hobsbawn, 1996; Moore, 2000; Ralston et al, 1999; Smith & Hill, 2009).

The anthropological perspective assumes that culture, not economics, is the primary driver of values in society, and hence that divergence will remain (Adler, 2002; Cialdini, 1988; Mwaura et al., 1998; Paik et al., 1996; Theimann et al., 2006; Wallace & Fogelson, 1961; Wilkin, 1999). Research into measuring and comparing cultural dimensions has become an important tool for understanding other cultural values. One of the main founders research on cultural dimensions, Hofstede (2001), surveyed 116,000 employees of IBM in 53 countries. On the basis of this study, he identified four dimensions of national culture: power distance, collectivism-individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, which can be used to explain many differences in values and behaviour. The newer and more in-depth GLOBE project, which measures nine cultural dimensions in 62 societal cultures, also asked respondents not only about cultural practices or how things are done, but about cultural values or how things should be done (House et al., 2004). These studies identify and track deep and consistent cultural patterns across decades, many of which can be shown to exist throughout centuries through referral to older texts and descriptions.

As a further example of studies using the divergence approach, Michael Bond and a group of researchers called the Chinese Culture Connection developed an instrument called the Chinese Value Survey (CVS), because they perceived that scientific surveys developed by Western researchers would not fully take into account the existence of very different sets of values prevalent in East Asia (Bond, 1983; Bond, 1991; Bond & Cheung, 1983; Bond et al., 1982; Bond & Forgas, 1984; Bond et al., 1992; Bond & Pang, 1991). Similarly, Chinese psychologists have argued that one must add Chinese attributes such as self-sacrifice to the widely used Big Five psychological assessment in order to make it meaningful for Chinese (Zhou et al., 2009). These are all attempts to get beyond a tendentially Western-centric approach to comparative studies that are sometimes seen as imperialistic.

Similarly, in South Africa, Hennie Kotzé, Principal Investigator of the World Values Survey, a worldwide network of social scientists (in collaboration with the European Values Study), is researching changing South African values and their impact on social and political life. He and his collaborators have shown, over many years, that South African values are a complicated mix of both Anglo-Saxon values as well as African values, compared them to other value sets (e.g., Arab), and shown that South African values and value orientations cannot be fully captured and understood through a purely Western lens (Kotzé , 2009; Kotzé , 2008; Kotzé & Lombard, 2002; Garcia Rivero et al., 2003; Gouws & Kotzé, 2007; Steyn & Kotzé, 2004). More recently, April and Peters (2011) argue that a nation's culture is rooted in its values and belief systems, and that the root difference between Western and South African cultural perspectives stems from the principles on which each learns and

develops these values and belief systems throughout their respective, and dynamic, histories. The Western world adopts a primarily scholastic approach based on facts, logic, and the nature of reality, whereas the African approach is based in humanism and communalism (Theimann et al., 2006). April and Peters (2011) argue that if any measurement within the South African context is to be considered meaningful, it needs to be cognisant of the daily dynamic of story, narrative, ritual, symbolism and myth, and the interconnectedness that defines the South African citizen.

The divergence perspective is strongly supported by research studies in the new field of cultural neurology (Del Rio, 2002; Littlewood, 1992). Studies, for example by Slaughter et al. (2004), show that similar neurological patterns occur during the perception of bodies and faces, whereas the recognition of ordinary objects entails a different neurological process. Research on culturally-biased perception, such as that by Nisbett (2003), has established that Western, especially Anglo, cultures value the individual and emphasize objects independently from their contexts, while East-Asian societies that value the collective also emphasize the contextual interdependence of objects. Collectivist cultures tend to promote the group over the individual, such that individuals are more prone to accept status differences rather than try to change them and assert the self (Rossier et al, 2005). Such values seem inconsistent with, for example, pride, an emotion geared toward enhancing and affirming the self (Tracy et al., 2007). Eid and Diener (2001) found that pride (as an example of the deep differences in cultural values) was one of the emotions that was valued differently across cultural groups, i.e., when comparing individualistic cultures like Australia and the USA vs. collectivist cultures like those in China and Taiwan.

Equally, in Africa where the dominant orientation is towards highly collectivist and interdependent cultural values, perceptions of highly social, cognitively-complex emotions and self-processes differ from those in more individualistic cultures, such as in the West (Tracy et al., 2007). Brain-imaging studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) go further to prove these are culturally-dependant neurological patterns (Olick, 1999; Stewart, 1995). Shown photographs of several people sitting in a group and told to focus on one individual and define his or her expression, Westerners look at the individual only while East Asians and Africans adjust their interpretation of the individual's emotion based on the expressions of the surrounding group (Masuda et al., 2008; Tracy et al., 2007; Yuki et al., 2007). The research shows that the perception and interpretation of situations varies deeply between cultures.

These studies show that even basic perception and mode of thought is deeply embedded in the processes of the brain. Some studies (Cavalli-Sforza et al., 1994; Feldman & Laland, 1996; Bettinger & Baumhoff, 1982) go so far as to posit a kind of cultural evolution, assuming that cultural values adapt to, and influence, the social and physical environments in which genetic selection takes place. One such study shows that cultural values of individualism and collectivism correlate to genetically-determined states, such as the frequency of certain serotonin transporters (Chiao & Blizinsky, 2009). Without seeking to assert bio-physical causation, the newer research seems indeed to support the primacy of culture in forming values.

So when we compare one generation across cultures, we must remember that surface observations do not directly imply behavioural similarity, much less a similarity in values. In Chinese and South African cities, you can enter a Starbucks and observe Chinese and South African youth dressed like their age groups in Europe or across the Americas, drinking cappuccinos, working on their laptops, and seeming just like a Starbucks frequenter anywhere else. This is indeed a sign of internationalization, but it is not a sign of Westernization. It is shared superficial behaviour, but does not signal a convergence of values (April & Blass, 2010; Lynton & Thøgersen 2010a).

As an illustration of these points, this article presents research on the values and attitudes of Generation Y respondents in China and in South Africa, defined as the demographic group born between 1980 and 1990. We compare the socio-economic environments, recent historical developments, the results from cultural values studies and our own survey results. Our hypothesis is that Chinese and South African Generation Y, despite similar trends in socio-economic development, will continue to show considerable values differences.

■Recent History and Environment: China

Following the devastation of invasions and civil war during World War II, in 1949 the People's Republic of China was founded as a communist nation under the leadership of Mao Ze Dong. While initially enthusiastic about building a new society, the economic results of the Great Leap Forward led to famine rather than industrial prowess and his power began to wane. At this point Mao launched the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), which stood society on its head, sending the educated to till the fields and elevating Maoist doctrine to the standard guideline for any undertaking, from medical operations to architecture. During this period China was essentially closed to the world.

Following Mao's death in 1976, Deng Xiao Ping led China into major economic reforms. Starting with the legalization of farmer's markets in 1978, and proceeding to the establishment of Special Economic Zones conceived to attract foreign investment, Deng proceeded to establish the market economy with Chinese characteristics. Warned by the political collapse of the USSR after 1989, the Chinese determined to move consistently towards an open economy while maintaining a closed political system. The results have been impressive. The powerhouse of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) countries, China has shown average double digit growth since

1980, lifted millions of people out of poverty, amassed foreign reserves of $ 2,454.3 billion in 2010, in 2009 overtook Japan as the second largest global economy, and in 2010 overtook Germany as the world's largest exporter. Goldman Sachs (2009) predicts that China will overtake the US as the largest global economy in 2027.

China's economic success is amazing, but also has a price. The Gini coefficient for China in 2007 was 40.1, or virtually the same as for Mexico, showing a worrying and growing inequality in income, particularly between the rural and urban areas. In 2007, China was 92 of 158 countries on the Human Development Index. According to the World Bank, pollution has reached such levels that 16 of the world's 20 most polluted cities are now located in China; it is estimated that the cost of such pollution is equivalent to 10% of GDP annually (China Daily, 2006). Many regions of China are running out of water, and the increase in social unrest is linked both to unfair appropriation of land and to pollution of such a degree that fishermen have no fish and farmers cannot plant on poisoned fields. The government is keenly aware of these issues and spends much capital and time on rural issues, while China has also become one of the leading producers of alternative energy equipment. Unfortunately, much of it is exported, while China just surpassed the US as the globe's largest energy consumer (People's Daily Online, 2009).

The Chinese population of 1.3 billion is homogeneous, with 91.5% ethnically Han Chinese (CIA Factbook, 2010). While there are striking regional differences, the educational and political systems and structures are similar across the country. There are regional dialects and accents, but all use the same written characters as Mandarin, as does Cantonese, which is spoken in the far South and Hong Kong. The remaining 8.5% of the population consists of 56 ethnic minorities along the land borders to Korea, Mongolia, Central Asia, Burma, Thailand and Laos. The groups that worry Beijing are the Muslim Uighurs in the far Western provinces, as they control extensive natural resources and have been linked to terrorist activity. Beijing's relationship with the Tibetan minority also remains tense.

Born between 1980 and 1990, Generation Y in China grew up during the economic boom and has experienced economic growth, increasing levels of material well-being and increasing personal freedom throughout their whole lives. During this period China's GDP per person grew from $192 to $2034, and the economy grew at an average rate of 10% annually. The developing private sector, and increasing investment by foreign enterprises, meant that Generation Y grew up amidst increasing consumer choice of both products and careers. The well-educated have been sought-after employees for both local organizations and multinational corporations (for local and international work). Despite the continuation of a one-party system and strict regulations around issues such as censorship, Generation Y has experienced the government primarily as enabling economic growth and increasing some freedoms, such as the choice of where to live, and the ease of obtaining a passport and foreign currency for travel. They also have seen the government as gaining respect for the nation on the world stage.

With the one-child policy, implemented in 1979, Generation Y is also the first generation of single children, bearing both the attention and responsibility for two parents and four grandparents on a single set of shoulders. The one-child policy has affected Chinese demography, producing a Christmas tree shaped population structure rather than the natural pyramid. Generation Y thus constitutes 41% of China's working age population, with a vast aging population above them and fewer children below (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). As they have moved from school into jobs, organizations have noticed that Generation Y makes different demands, and needs to be motivated in new ways.

In urban China, Generation Y is a group of exceptionally talented people. No other generation in Chinese history has received such high-quality education across so many people. According to studies, such as those by Poston and Falbo (1990), China's solo children perform significantly better academically than peers with siblings. These single children have grown up in traditional extended families, under pressure since kindergarten to pass entrance exams. The combination of memorizing characters which has been shown to encourage IQ development, and the fact that the child's educational performance has been a top priority for six adults means Generation Ys have been generously stimulated throughout childhood and are more intelligent, better educated, and also often more hyper-sensitive than many other people (Lynton & Thøgersen, 2010a, b). The demographic situation has made understanding what motivates Generation Y, and how to best involve them in organizational structures, a matter of importance for organizations and corporations in China and abroad.

■Recent History and Environment: South Africa

From 1948-1994, South Africa maintained formal Apartheid, a system for socially and economically separating the population along ethnic lines, with the result that all populations-of-colour, but particularly the African Black populations, were seriously disadvantaged. During much of this time there was an international embargo on South Africa, leaving it with few economic partners, except the other sanctioned and oppressive economies of that time, e.g., Iran and Chile and, curiously, Israel. From the mid-1970's, South Africa experienced more than a decade of protests and violent reprisals, leaving bitter lines drawn between social, ethnic and economic groups. The major event in recent South African history was the brokering of a stable peace between groups and parties in the early 1990s (with early conversations taking place in the 1980s). So unlikely was a peaceful transition to post-Apartheid South Africa, that Nelson Mandela and Frederik Willem de Klerk

jointly received the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for their work. The role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in helping to heal the anger and pain emerging from decades of separation and inter-group systemic abuse and violence remains unique, though it serves as a role model for countries like Cambodia today.

The abolishment of Apartheid, and the first election by universal suffrage, took place in April 1994, when Mandela was democratically elected President. The ANC has maintained its majority and the presidency ever since, and the country continues to deal with all the challenges of an emerging economy and developing society. Known as 'the Rainbow Nation', South Africa has a truly diverse population as the result of colonization and immigration from Europe, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China joining the indigenous Black populations. One of the byproducts of Apartheid was employment guidelines that gave preference to White South Africans, the minority group within the population, both in the economy and socially. Today South Africa has about 49 million people, of whom 79.3 % are African Black, 9.1% White, 9% Coloured (mixed race), and 2.5% are Indian/Asian (Stats SA, 2009). One must remember that African Blacks are not a monolithic group but rather consist of nine major tribal and ethnic groups. Also, because of employment equity legislation, the term 'Black' is additionally used as a blanket term used to describe people who are African Black, Coloured and Indian. Under employment equity laws, set out to help redress the past disparities and skewed inequality in access and economic opportunity, this grouping under the term 'Black', together with White females and, recently, Chinese, are considered 'previously disadvantaged groups' (or groups who suffered most under Apartheid, which essentially economically, politically and socially served White males). The Whites consist of two historically different populations, i.e., those of British and Dutch ancestry.

The new constitution therefore promotes 11 official languages, however English is the business language of the country. Every child in school has to learn English, in addition to the other languages they may prefer in their region of the country. Approximately 79.8% of South Africa's population follows the Christian faith, while other religious groupings include Muslims (1.5%), Hindus (1.2%), African Traditionalists (0.3%), Jews (0.2%) and the rest falling into Buddhist- and no specific religious affiliation categories.

Since the opening of South Africa with the advent of democracy in 1994, the economy has been completely overhauled. These changes include the reduction in trade protection and exchange controls and the opening of its market to the world (as in many emerging economies), the implementation of bold macroeconomic reforms and prudent fiscal management (including the curbing and cutting of inflation and reining in of the fiscal deficit), and a rapid extension of in-country infrastructure and technological expansion to boost competitiveness. From 1984 to 1994, South Africa's economic growth rate averaged less than 1% a year. However, from 1999 up to the start of the global recession, the South African economy has been in an upward phase of the business cycle – the longest period of economic expansion in the country's recorded history. For example, in 2002, the country's real gross domestic product (GDP) rose by 3.7%, 3.1% in 2003, 4.9% in 2004, 5% in 2005, 5.4% in 2006 (the highest since 1981), 5.1% in 2007, 3.6% in 2008, -1.5% in 2009, 2.9% in 2010, and 3.1% in 2011.

However, vast inequalities in the distribution of wealth are still a problem. The first nationally representative household income and living standards survey conducted in South Africa, by the World Bank, indicated that half of all African Black South Africans lived in poverty in 1993, a stunning portrayal of material deprivation and inequality in an upper-middle income country with a per capita income of in excess of US$3,000 (Carter & May, 2001). Carter and May's (2001) research shows that by 1998 the top 20% of households had become better off in 1998 than they were in 1993. According to Sheehan and Iglesias (1998), this increase in the upper tail of the income distribution arguably signaled an increase in 'productive inequality' that reflected the desirable operation on an incentive system that encouraged accumulation of skills and human capital. However, for the lower quartile, there were greater numbers of households at the real low income levels in 1998 as opposed to 1993 (with real poverty, at this level, increasing from 27% to 43% over the period, and 18% labeled as chronically poor) (Carter & May, 2001) – highlighting the growing gap between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in this emerging economy. In 2007, South Africa was 129th of 158 countries on the Human Development Index and, in 2009, the GINI coefficient had risen to 65 (CIA Factbook, 2010), leading to reports before the parliament that the country has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the world (Pressley, 2009), AIDS has been officially acknowledged a problem and is rampant with a prevalence rate of 10.5% (Statistics SA, 2010), crime and corruption remain issues and there is still emigration of better-educated South Africans. Despite these and other problems, South Africa successfully hosted the FIFA World Cup in 2010, has an open press, has one of the best banking systems in the world, and continues working to address issues of social inequality especially in the areas of housing, education and healthcare. At the Copenhagen Forum in 2009, international newspapers briefly dropped the acronym BRIC for BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) indicating the importance of South Africa's soft power and economic position and Russia's lack of involvement.

In South Africa, nearly one third (31.4%) of the population are younger than 15 years old, and 7.5% (3.7 million) are 60 years or older (Stats SA, 2009). At present, just over half the population is

under 25, so Generation Y is part of an expanding population. In 2010, Generation Y constituted 29.4% of South Africa's working age population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Born during the last decade of Apartheid, many of them have childhood memories of protests, violence, and armoured vehicles patrolling their streets, and an inherent distrust of authority. However their formative years were also during the intense post-Apartheid period of building a new nation and becoming truly democratic. South Africa's Generation Y has come of age in a time of increased wealth, opportunity and openness, but also of greater income inequality. This often called "born free" generation of mostly Black South Africans have grown up in a different world, and in particular a country that is very different from what their parents knew (Puybaraud, 2010). Many of these young people are the first Black generation to have benefitted educationally from the political change, and are sometimes also referred to as model "C" kids because they have been able to attend traditional White model "C" schools in previously exclusive White suburbs. Gen Y'ers are therefore more entrepreneurial than previous generations, display skepticism of corporations and hierarchy, while seeking output-driven workplaces with more informal workspaces than the rigid, paternalistic, command structures of the Boomer generation that preceded them (Hole et al., 2010). This fits the pattern for Gen Y globally, and likewise, according to Puybaraud (2010:5), 61% of South Africa's Gen Y prefer to have a flexible working pattern as opposed to the 51% who expect to have a fixed or conventional working pattern, 45% prefer to use team spaces rather than traditional meeting rooms (23%), and 56% prefer their employer to demonstrate their engagement in environmental issues at work, and to go beyond regulatory compliance. This study shows that the top priorities for Gen Y when choosing an employer in South Africa are: opportunities for learning, quality of life, work colleagues and having meaningful work.

■Understanding Cultural Values

One path to understanding cultural values is through data such as the cultural dimension studies carried out by Hofstede (2001), Schwartz (1992), Trompenars (1993) or the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). These informational sources all emphasize basic patterns. For instance, they clearly identify patterns of Chinese business culture that differ from those in the West. The most significant differences for China are the strong reliance on the collective, the importance of networks, the overlap of government and business, strong hierarchies, and the dominance of relationships over rules in all aspects of life

Comparing the cultural dimension data on China and South Africa, one sees that Hofstede's (2001) data shows South Africa as mid-level on Power-Distance or hierarchy, far more egalitarian than China, and tending towards individualism, while China is strongly collectivist. The scores for Masculinity are similar, showing that both China and South Africa are more aggressive, fast and results-oriented, while both cultures are somewhat uncomfortable with uncertainty, change and risk.

Table 1: Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Data: China-South Africa

Country	**Power Distance**	**Individualism**	**Masculinity**	**Uncertainty Avoidance**
China	80	20	66	40
South Africa	49	65	63	49

Source: http://www.geert-hofstede.com

The GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) went into more detail on the dimensions and also differentiated between the answers of Black and White South Africans.

Table 2: GLOBE Dimensions: China-South Africa

GLOBE Dimensions	**China**	**South Africa Black/White**
Performance Orientation	4.45	4.66 / 4.11
Assertiveness	3.76	4.36 / 4.60
Future Orientation	3.75	4.64 / 4.13
Humane Orientation	4.36	4.34 / 3.49
Institutional Collectivism	4.77	4.39 / 4.62
In-Group Collectivism	5.80	5.09 / 4.50
Gender Equalitarianism	3.05	3.66 / 3.27
Power Distance	5.04	4.11 / 5.16
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.94	4.59 / 4.09

Source: House et al. (2004)

The GLOBE data is rather contradictory to Hofstede, likely reflecting the difference in survey method and even more, the far larger and cross-industry sample used by GLOBE. In addition to the numerical scores, countries are also assigned bands to ensure that surface differences or similarities are not over-interpreted and potential random error is neutralized (House et al., 2004: 220).

The major differences between China and South Africa, identified by the GLOBE data, are along the dimensions of:

Assertiveness: This dimension refers to tough, confrontational and competitive behaviour. Compared to all global scores, both Black and White South African scores are among the high-score band. China is at the bottom of the middle-band.

Future Orientation: This dimension measures the significance of planning, investing in the future and delaying gratification. While China is near the top of the medium-low scoring band, Black South Africans are in the high band while White South Africans are in the medium-high band.

Humane Orientation: This dimension measures the importance of fairness, altruism, generosity,

caring and kindness to others. China and Black South Africans are in the medium-high band, while White South Africans are in the low band.

In-Group Collectivism: This dimension measures pride, loyalty and cohesiveness in the organisation or family. China scores high, ranking 9th of a total of 61 country scores. Black South Africans score much higher than White South Africans, but both are still in the global middle-band, ranking 35th and 43rd respectively.

Power Distance: This dimension measures unequally shared power, dominance, and stratification by status. China is in the global high-band, with the South African scores diverging widely. The White South Africans score is more hierarchical than those of the Chinese, while the Black South Africans score is extremely low, ranking second to last globally.

The cultural dimension data provides a framework within which to better interpret the data elicited from Generation Y individuals in China and South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The data on which this analysis is based consists of survey responses from 151 Chinese and 121 South Africans born between 1980 and 1990. The self–completion questionnaire was administered electronically to participants at the Graduate School of Business at the University of Cape Town and to employees in Johannesburg (South Africa). The Chinese set consisted of MBA students of the China Europe International Business School (CEIBS) in Shanghai, MBA students at Fudan University in Shanghai, and employees in Beijing. Forty of the Chinese respondents self-completed the online questionnaire in the same way as the South Africans; the remaining 111 Chinese respondents self-completed the same survey, but as a paper-based exercise. It is important to note that the samples are not representative of their national populations as wholes. Rather, the respondents in both countries are representative of urban, well-educated, professional sub-populations.

Eighteen responses were eliminated from the South African results because participants did not complete a sufficient number of questions to be useable. Nine responses were eliminated from the Chinese electronic survey results for the same reason. No responses were eliminated from the paper-based Chinese results as all were useable, however the paper-based mode allowed skipping of questions and commenting, thus causing some variation in the number of total responses collected for each question. The final total of respondents used was 103 South African and 142 Chinese.

Although the respondents are comparable in terms of age, gender and background, the data sets show minor demographic differences: the South African participants are slightly younger (15% more are under 25 than among the Chinese group) and slightly less female (41.3% compared to 48%). In order to use the same survey, we did not request participants to identify their ethnic group, and so racial demographics were not included.

DATA RESULTS: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Spirituality: Asked whether they considered themselves spiritual persons, one of the largest surprises was that 54% of the Chinese respondents considered themselves to be very spiritual (7 to 10 on a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 being high), with 19.7% being somewhat spiritual (4-6 on 10 point scale). The South African responses were similar at 57% and 32.5% respectively. That both groups define themselves as spiritual, given the differing histories and attitudes towards religion of the two countries, is surprising.

From 1949 until about 2000, religion was discouraged in China and superstition was not politically acceptable. This changed when the Chinese government declared itself a Buddhist country, holding the largest world conference on Buddhism ever held, the World Buddhist Forum in Hangzhou, in 2006. At the same time, Confucianism began to be popular once again, and has the government's support. Nonetheless, most Chinese Generation Y'ers do not engage in particular spiritual practices but every respondent interviewed, and most of those surveyed, referred to "destiny" as an important aspect of their lives.

In South Africa, various forms of Christianity and other religions have been widely practiced for many decades, and Apartheid was even founded on Christian Nationalism, led by the mainly Afrikaner Dutch Reformed church. Figures such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, also a Nobel Laureate, played significant roles in the transition from Apartheid to post-Apartheid South Africa. Today, almost 80% of South Africa's population follows the Christian faith. The global acknowledgement of such numbers was highlighted by the meeting of the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelism in Cape Town in October 2010 (with 5,800 leaders from more than 200 countries). Other major religious groups in South Africa are: Hindus, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists. A minority of South Africa's population do not belong to any of the major religions, but regard themselves as traditionalists of no specific religious affiliation. Because the traditional religions of the African people have a strong cultural basis, the various groups have different rituals, but there are certain common features. A supreme being is generally recognised, and ancestors are of great significance. As a result of close contact with Christianity, many people find themselves in a transitional phase somewhere between Traditional African Religion and Christianity. This probably explains that, when

asked what they do when feeling insecure, South Africans responded strongly with "meditation, prayer, and reflection".

The similarity of both sets of research respondent scores on spirituality may partly result from the Chinese government's change of perspective, but probably reflects even more the desire of Generation Y to find meaning in their lives.

Family: Family is highly significant for Generation Y in both surveyed groups. Asked about the value they place on family, the answers were quite similar. No South African and 1.4% of Chinese reported they put very little value on family; 12.3% of South Africans and 3.6% of Chinese said the family has middle-level value to them (4 to 6 on a 10 point scale), and 87.7% of South Africans and 98% of Chinese defined family as extremely important (7 to 10 on a 10 point scale). In the GLOBE research, China ranks extremely high in in–group collectivism, while South Africa is in the medium range (House et al, 2004). Nonetheless, the role of family is of great significance in both countries.

However, when asked about their dreams, 39.8% of South Africans and 37% of Chinese answered 'family'. It is interesting that, in answer to the question "what inspires you?", 27.2% of South Africans and only 11% of Chinese chose the answer 'family'.

To the question "who do you usually make friends with?", 26.2% of South African respondents chose "family members", while only 6.5% of Chinese chose this answer. Asked "what makes you happy?", 51.0% of South Africans and 26% of Chinese answered with 'family'. And when they feel insecure, 34.3% of South Africans and 29% of Chinese want to be with their families or friends.

The data indicates the family plays a significant role in the lives of both South African and Chinese young people, but its place seems to be somewhat different for the two groups. It appears that South African Generation Y see their families more as friends and sources of pleasure, than do their Chinese peers. This may reflect that, as single children, Chinese experience small families and so feel the responsibility of needing to care for much older relatives keenly. The traditional cultural role of sacrificing for the family good, building the family reputation, and caring for the elderly seems to make family more of a burden and less of a pleasure for Chinese. It remains, however, extremely important for them; South African families, on the other hand, tend to be bigger, including cousins and aunts and uncles and such who can be chosen as friends and also help carry responsibilities.

Motivation: The survey included a series of questions aimed at understanding what inspires and motivates Generation Y. Several similar questions were asked in the course of the survey that provoked overlapping answers. In many ways the South African and Chinese respondents are quite similar. In answering the question "what inspires you?", the top three answers for the South African group were: 'Self-Fulfilment, Achievement, and New things/Ideas'. For the Chinese group they were: 'Love, Self-Fulfilment, and New things/ideas'. Similarly, the top three choices for both South African and Chinese respondents to the question: "What is your dream for life?" were: 'Balanced life, happiness and family'. The major difference as the answers continue is that South Africans rank 'Make a difference' fourth, while the Chinese rank it ninth; similarly the Chinese rank 'make a contribution' fourth which the South Africans rank at 10/11 together with 'Peace'.

There are also some deeper divergences. As discussed above, when asked: "What is really important to you?", both South Africans and Chinese ranked family first. However, South Africans follow that with happiness and self-growth, while for Chinese the next items are health and friends. These may seem like small differences, but they show a trend indicating that South Africans are more concerned with their individually-based measures (happiness, self growth, health) while Chinese put a group of others (friends) in the top three. In a similar vein, South Africans trust first their family, at the same level with their spouse/significant other, and then themselves, God/Jesus/Buddha, their friends, and finally their parents. Chinese however, trust their friends, then their parents, their family, themselves, and only then their spouse/significant other before turning to religious figures. Again we see the Chinese preferring groups (friends, parents, family) over single individuals.

This would seem to correlate with the higher Chinese scores on in-group collectivism, which refers to pride and loyalty in the family or group (GLOBE, 2004). While the family is clearly also very important to South Africans, it does not seem to have quite the central role in young people's lives. This seems further supported by the results of the item: "What makes you happy?" While South Africans put 'love/relationship' and then 'achievement' before family in their answers, for Chinese respondents' 'achievement' is in first place and 'family/love/ relationship' are tied for second place.

One phenomenon is particularly striking. On the item "given one wish, how could your life be better?", South Africans put 'more time with family' as number one and 'better personality' in fifth and final place. As for the Chinese, 'more money, better career, and further study' come in the middle. For the Chinese, number one is 'better personality' and number five is 'more time with family'. In other words, only the first and last places are exactly reversed. We have just stated that the family is apparently more important for Chinese; why would they put it last? And why would they put 'better personality' first? One hypothesis would be that the Chinese are already spending a lot of time with their families, and are worried that their individual selves, their personalities, are not strong enough for business success. The South Africans appear to have the opposite worries.

The Self – Locus of Control: In describing themselves on a ten point scale from 1=the most introverted/shy to 10= the most extroverted/assertive, there are wide differences between the South African and Chinese respondents. The South African answers are only 9.6% very introverted and 56.1% very extroverted, while the Chinese are much less extreme in their answers, at 23.9%, 47.1%,

and 28.8% respectively. This seems to reflect the Chinese value placed on harmony or the golden mean. They are socialized to appear steady and even-tempered.

The concept of self is deeply tied to cultural patterns of individualism and collectivism. Individualism refers to a cultural l pattern in which independent individuals are loosely linked in a variety of networks and ties (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Collectivism refers to a cultural pattern in which individuals are defined by their membership in one or more groups, and are therefore interdependent with the other group members. Those in more collectivist cultures typically are primarily motivated by the needs of the group, whereas those in more individualist cultures are primarily motivated by their own personal needs and desires.

China is a collectivist culture, especially in terms of pride and loyalty to the in-group or those in a small network of relationships (Hofstede, 2001; House et al, 2004). It is also a context-driven, holistic culture, as demonstrated by studies in cultural neurology discussed in the introduction (e.g., Nisbett, 2003; Masuda, et al. 2008; Yuki, et al. 2007). Studies at MIT show that Westerners and East Asians have varying neurological patterns when making the same judgements. Westerners expend more energy when recognizing interdependence and Easterners struggle more when recognizing independent objects. The research demonstrates that "the cultural background of an individual and the degree to which the individual endorses cultural values moderate activation in brain networks engaged during even simple visual and attentional tasks" (Hedden, 2008). Accordingly, as collectivists, Chinese begin with a view of life, work and community that is more integrated into one whole than that of individualists and is based on higher inter-dependence among groups (Lynton & Thøgersen, 2009).

As implied by the label, individualists emphasize the individual: each one's feelings, each one's responsibility and each one's rights. Despite the prevalence of the concept 'Ubuntu'1, South Africa is far more individualistic as a culture than China (House et al, 2004). When asked to define what freedom means to them, South African respondents in this study emphasized "making own decisions, independence and financial freedom" about twice as often as the Chinese respondents. Similarly, asked "what do you fear?", the answers are similar for both sets of respondents except that South Africans are far more afraid of 'failure' than the Chinese. These answers seem logical since the more individualistic South Africans emphasize independence rather than interdependence, while the Chinese attribute much of what happens to destiny and so see it as beyond their control.

The predominant and historical orientation of South African organizations has been Western and individualistic. In 2006, Sims conducted a study on cross-cultural differences towards business ethics, based on the Hofstede framework, in Israel, South Africa, Turkey, the USA, Western Australia, Jamaica and the West Indies. This study reported that South Africa, together with the USA, Jamaica and Australia were considered as moderate power-distance cultures (Robbins et al., 2005; Sims, 2006). In the collectivist dimension, South Africa and Israel were considered as moderately individualistic, a culture where people feel free to speak their minds and are often considered as honest in doing so.

However, over the past twenty years, there has been a massive influx of Black South Africans into all levels of organizations. As a result, both collective and individualistic cultural values are represented in South African organizations. The research of Singelis and Triandis (1995) asserts that people who function within an upper class in a modern, industrial-urban and fast-changing environment tend to become more individualistic. The predominant social community networks, premised on communalism in African Black culture, however have begun to permeate South African organizations at the cooperative level and the teamwork level, known as 'shosholoza' (Mbigi, 1997). It must be stressed though, that the collectivism of Ubuntu and teamwork of shosholoza do not necessarily imply a depersonalization of the individual (Khoza, 1994), nor an oppressive conformity and loyalty (Louw, 2002). Under Ubuntu, there is an individual existence of the self and the simultaneous existence for others, treating the other person with dignity, respect and as worthy (Luthans et al., 2004). According to Louw (2002) and Mbigi (2000), it is a continuous exploration of reconciliation and general agreement, and a true appreciation of the different views of others. The Coloured group, on the other hand, portrays a predominant Western, Afrikaans/English and pro-White culture, and they feel culturally close to Whites as opposed to Blacks (Corder, 2001; Mullett, 2002; Vosloo, 1998) – more individual cultural values could thus be expected from them.

This is borne out by a study on locus of control among young South African and Chinese (Stocks, April & Lynton, 2010). Locus of control examines people's beliefs about the amount of control they have over situations in their lives. Individuals with an internal locus of control believe that they can control events related to their life, while individuals with an external locus of control believe that real power resides outside themselves and determines their life. According to Stocks, April and Lynton (2010), Generation Y Chinese exhibit an external locus of control that seems deeply rooted in cultural and behavioural norms as it does not relate to demographic variables. Their data show that Generation Y South Africans, in contrast to other research on South Africa, exhibit extreme internal locus of control but vary according to demographic data such as gender and age. This reflects the difference in levels of individualism and collectivism (Spector et al., 2002; Smith, Trompenaars & Dugan, 1995; Weisz, Rothbaum & Blackburn, 1984). The assumption that locus of control is linked to cultural patterns is supported by the research presented here.

Peer Group: One widespread assumption in work on young adults is that the peer group is the main point of reference from adolescence onward. In this regard, the Chinese respondents fit the global pattern as they emphasize the importance of their friends. Asked who they trust, South Africans rank friends fifth, named by 30.4% of respondents while for Chinese friends come first, named by 44.2% and ahead of family, spouse or parents.

In describing their friends, both the South African and the Chinese respondents rank "Smart/Interesting/Fun" as the top descriptor, but then the rankings differ. For South Africans, 'Easy-Going' and 'Honest/Integrity' follow, whereas for Chinese, 'Friendly/Kind/Nice' and 'Alike' take 2nd and 3rd place. This fits the responses to the item: "Who do you usually make friends with?" South African respondents listed 'people who share the same value' in 1st place, classmates 2nd, colleagues at 3rd. And Chinese respondents listed classmates and colleagues in 1st and 2nd place, with 'alumni' in 3rd place. It is striking that 66.0% of South Africans stated that they are friends with 'people who share the same value' while only 29.6% of Chinese agreed. In further clarification, 30.1% of South Africans but only 8.8% of Chinese said they are friends with 'people who are different'.

It appears that the experience of diversity is crucial in developing openness to people different from oneself (Hu & Kuh, 2003). That the South African respondents embrace friends different from themselves reflects their social environment; they live in the 'rainbow nation', and despite historically-rooted separation between ethnic groups, Generation Y has mostly grown up in an increasing integrated and multi-lingual society. Given the self-reported high level of extroversion and the GLOBE results of high assertiveness, it appears that young South Africans are also more emotionally open than their Chinese peers (House et al, 2004). Most Chinese Generation Y'ers have grown up and attended school and university only with other Han Chinese, hearing and learning other languages only in the classroom. They are self-reportedly not extroverted, show low assertiveness on GLOBE, and prefer low-levels of emotional response.

Perceived Change: The final set of survey items discussed refers to attitudes to change. On the one hand, asked: "Is your life better than your parent's life?", 70.6% of South Africans and 92% of Chinese answered positively. They believe this improvement goes along with changing values however. We asked the respondents to identify how similar their values are to those of their parents on a ten-point scale with 1 being no overlap of values and 10 being completely the same. 5.3% of South Africans and 13.5% of Chinese reported very little overlap (1-3); 29.8% of South Africans and 40.4% Chinese saw some overlap (4-6); and 64.9% of South Africans and 46.1% of Chinese saw much overlap of values (7-10). The more extreme perceived differences between generations in China probably reflect the impact of more rapid urbanization and faster paced economic change in the country. Until recently, in Shanghai for example the highest wage earning group was 25 year-olds who mostly still live at home with their parents who earn often a tenth of the child's salary, have never left the country and do not speak a foreign language. Their child however is likely to speak English and travel internationally in addition to experiencing easy access to money. This leads to major perceived differences in lifestyle, and hence in perceived values. While the changes in South Africa have been significant, they have not generally been so extreme.

CONCLUSION

Globalization leads to increased linkage of economies, information, and ideas. This means that population groups, in this case generations, know much more about their peers in other countries than before. Fashion trends, social networking, and technology are three areas in which, for instance, the youth in China, India, South Africa, and Western Europe seem more and more similar. But one must beware of generalizations. Just because the Starbucks' populations in Johannesburg and Shanghai may drink the same cappuccino, link into the same networks using the same iPhone, and share the same jeans and handbag brands, does not mean that their modes of thinking or their values are the same.

This insight is important as organizations seek to globalize and struggle with how to become effective and relevant in a variety of countries. Both private and public sector organizations and multinational companies struggle with the pull between creating global standards and processes and the need to adapt these locally. Basic human resources processes such as selection, assessment, incentive systems, performance management and training cannot be based on the assumption that staff in different regions is motivated by the same things in the same ways. We must recognize that even among same generational groups that may superficially appear similar, their cultural values and preferences will remain different despite a perhaps shared experience of rapid socio-economic change.

Both South African and Chinese Generation Y'ers have matured in fast-changing environments. In China this generation has experienced constant change, especially in the areas of economy and infrastructure, which in turn impact opportunities and social mobility. In South Africa the major change, namely the transition to post-Apartheid society, occurred when some of the older Generation Ys were already in school. Since then, the economic, social and political changes have been rapid and ongoing, resulting in new opportunities for many young people and leading others to worry about the future. In both countries educational opportunities have become more common for a larger group of youth, and most of these Generation Ys see their lives as easier than those of their parents.

The differences in results from the South African and Chinese respondents, however, are wide enough to indicate that cultural patterns run deep. We have seen that differing levels of in-group

collectivism, individualism, assertiveness and hierarchy demonstrated by cultural research are also reflected in the research discussed here. It seems that culture remains the determining factor for many of the attitudes of Generation Y despite the apparent trappings of a growing global youth culture.

It would therefore be a real mistake for global organizations, especially multinational corporations, to design and implement employee programs based on the assumption that Generation Y values are the same around the world. Instead, they must look at culture-specific research in order to develop appropriate responses.

■Endnotes

'Ubuntu' can be defined as: I am because we are. I can only be a person through others (Mbigi & Maree, 1995).

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